You can't fake a tape! Pictures don't lie!

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

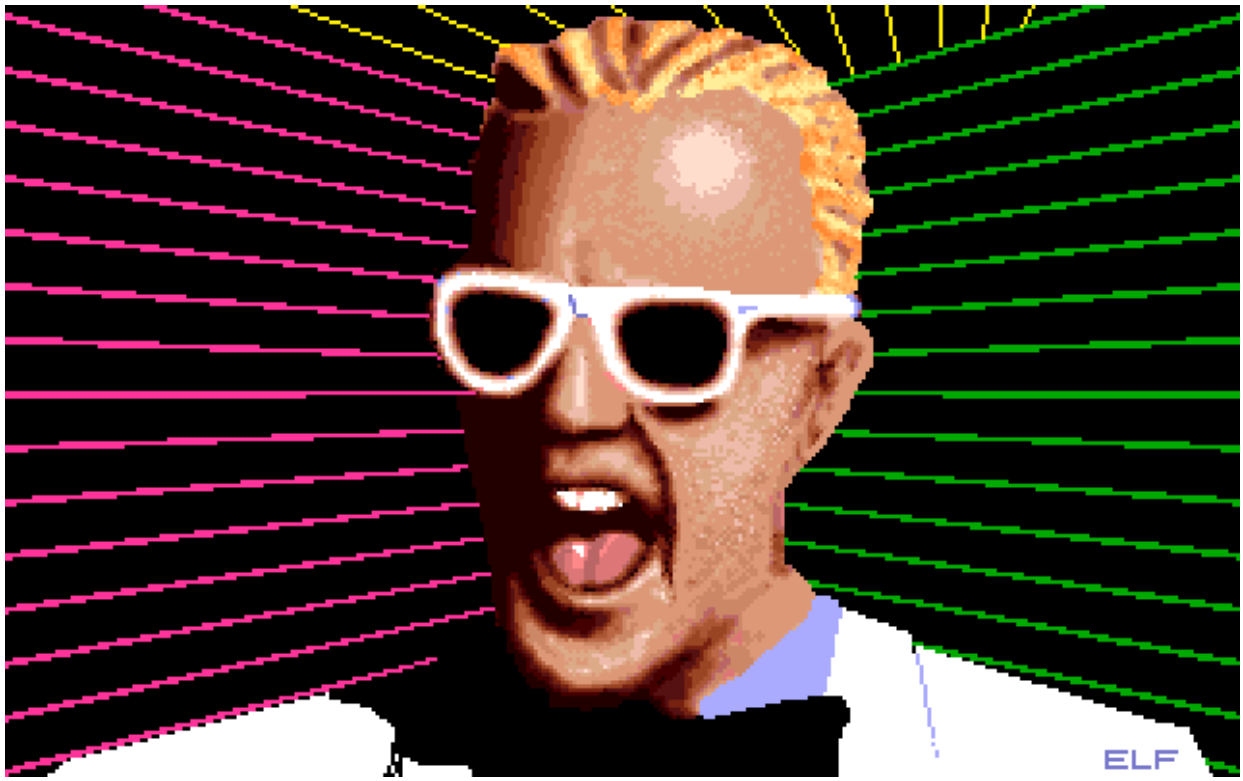
None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Max Headroom proclaimed to be "the World's first computer-generated TV host", only he wasn't at all. Max was played by one of those human creatures we refer to as 'humans'. In this case an actor by the name of Matt Frewer.

In the 1985 eponymous TV movie set "20 minutes into the future" Max was treated to an origin story to 'flesh' out his character. Pre-transformation Max began his career as a roving news anchor known as Edison Carter working for the scurrilous Network 23 corporation.

In the course of his duties, crusading journalist Edison rumbles a perilous advertising scheme that bombards couch potatoes with 30-second commercials condensed into 3-second 'blipverts'. This would be considered par for the course except that some susceptible individuals find that their head can explode upon exposure to the rapid-fire messages. Rather than cease using the technology, the Network 23 bigwigs intend to cover up any evidence that is likely to jeopardise their bottom line. This includes silencing Edison.

Whilst attempting to flee from their hired goons on a motorbike Edison crashes into a 'max. headroom' sign situated at the car park's exit. Regaining consciousness Edison finds himself held hostage as the execs and their computer wizkid head of security, Bryce Lynch, debate how to handle the situation.



Obviously the solution is to upload his brain into a computer, recreating the reporter as a pliable, artificially intelligent CGI puppet who will only spout the party line, covering safe stories that won't expose Network 23 as the dystopian hell-spawn evil cretins they truly are. The last thing he remembers of the ordeal is that pivotal car park sign, hence the name.

Matt Frewer's foam and latex prosthetics, glitch-like staccato stammer and fibreglass suit were so convincing much of the audience believed the producers of the show had actually pulled off the impossible; to invent an artificially intelligent,

self-aware TV personality. Of course in the '80s the technology wasn't sufficiently advanced to make this feasible, thus the lie was born.

It was a deviously clever, well-executed concept, it's just a shame the movie was so tedious. Even with a runtime of only 58 minutes the pace plods. Matt under the guise of Max enjoys very little screen-time, and he's after all who we 'bought' our ticket to see. Edison isn't nearly as interesting owing to a lack of character development; we're *told* he's a hotshot reporter who single-handedly nails every juicy story, yet never get to see him in action.

Max Headroom the franchise is a subject that's been talked to death ever since his conception in 1984, in large part thanks to Max's cameo in Back to the Future II, his stint advertising New Coca Cola, and the notorious double TV station broadcast hack he orchestrated in 1987. To be clear, the person responsible for the latter has never been identified or prosecuted; the only connection to Max Headroom is that the perpetrator disguised himself with a replica of his mask when talking into and mooning at the camera... as he was 'spanked' with a flyswatter. No, really,

this happened. Many hours have been spent analysing and debating the intrusion and who might have been behind it. *How* is clearly understood, *who* remains an enigma.

Something that's sidelined along the way in all this debate is the question, who/what was the first *genuine* CGI TV news presenter? Well, it appears that this didn't transpire until as recently as November 2018 when China's Xinhua state news agency hit the headlines by unveiling a digital facsimile of their regular flesh and bone news anchor, Qiu Hao. Simulating his appearance, non-verbal communication, and voice, Qiu's doppelganger was developed via 'machine learning' to provide a news stooge who can report indefinitely without whining, needing to be paid, or demanding blue M&Ms for lunch.

"Not only can I accompany you 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. I can be endlessly copied and present at different scenes to bring you the news."

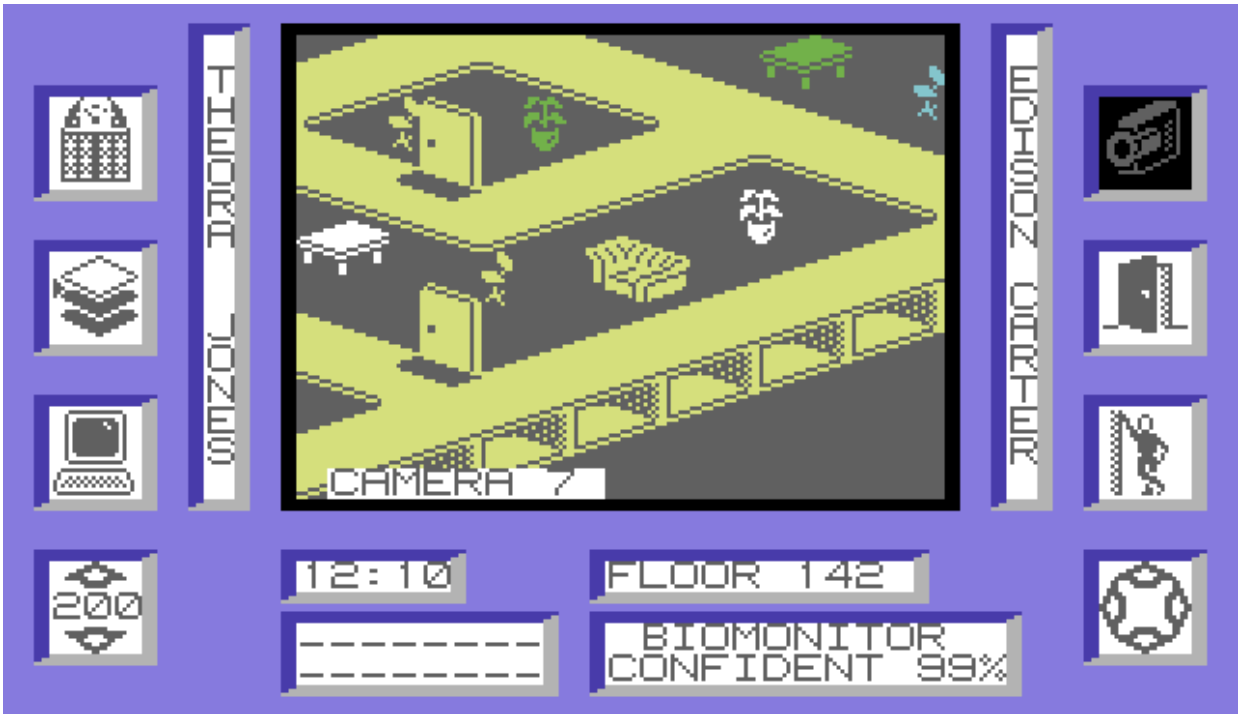
Imagine that; live on location in multiple regions simultaneously. Normally whenever this occurs we call it a 'lie' and someone resigns in shame. There was a movie about it based on a true story starring that American comedy actor I also forget the name of. It was alright; he got sacked then moped about a bit mulling over what an idiot he'd been.

An alternative, English-speaking clone (the previous quote must have been translated) based on another real presenter, chimed in...

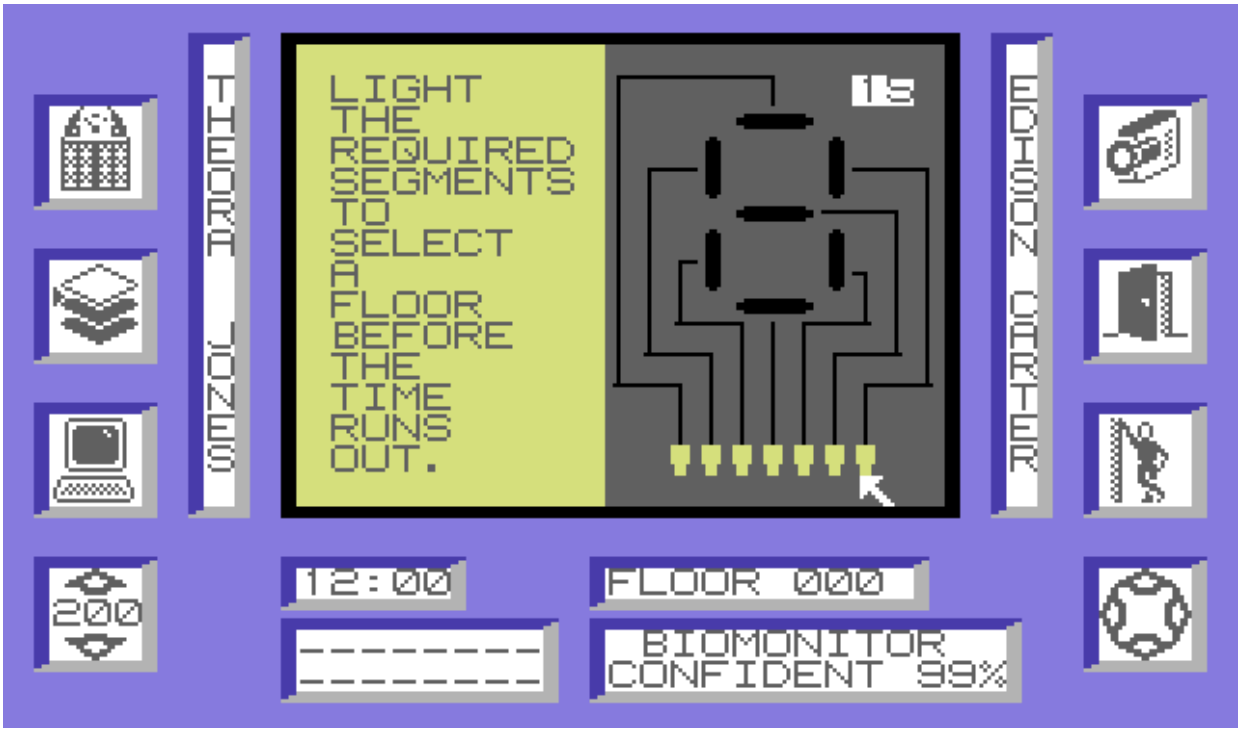
> "The development of the media industry calls for continuous innovation and deep integration with the international advanced technologies, I look forward to bringing you brand new news experiences."

Possibly the reason this hadn't happened until now is that while these pseudo-twins are a fascinating novelty to gawp at for five minutes, they're no substitute for corporeal people. It turns out that being taught by dead-behind-the-eyes cybernetic constructs that look almost human, yet *aren't*, is freakily unnerving. We've achieved that, now let's retire the idea until we the viewers are also comprised of procedurally generated computer technology so appreciate that vacant stare and mindless parroting.

One or two years prior to this - 1986 to be exact - Quicksilva achieved the same thing (ish) via the medium of 8-bit gaming. Their isometric action-puzzler accompaniment to the TV movie drops us into the shoes of Edison who's tasked with navigating the Network 23 skyscraper offices in an effort to locate and recover the personality module of his alter-ego Max Headroom.



Racing against the clock, this mostly entails establishing the access codes required to visit various floors via the lift. There are 211 floors altogether with Max residing somewhere between numbers 200 and 211.



THEORA JONES
LIFT
EDISON CARTER
200
12:03
FLOOR 142
BIOMONITOR
CONFIDENT 99%

THEORA JONES
ENTER THE LIGHT SEQUENCE IN REVERSE ORDER TO OBTAIN CONTROL OF THE FLOOR.
7199
EDISON CARTER
200
12:04
FLOOR 142
BIOMONITOR
CONFIDENT 99%

Obstructing our progress are killer robots and the dilemma that it's all as insanely dull as the movie on which the game is based. Sadly the highlight is the finale and that's 99% unintelligible. Liberate Max and we're treated to quite an impressively lengthy garbled speech sample from the talking head himself. If you can decipher what on earth he's wittering on about (or just read the subtitles in the Speccy version) it's actually quite funny.

There was no Amiga incarnation as the 16-bit system was barely on the cusp of its adoption at this stage. Disappointingly, creation of the 'real' Max had nothing to do with the Amiga as some believe.

Whilst the Commodore Amiga platform was utilised to produce background graphics for the US TV show remake, it *wasn't* deployed in rendering his head... obviously because living, breathing actors don't demand digital generation and 3D printing hadn't been invented yet. Four-and-a-half-hour

make-up sessions were sufficient! However, all of the computers seen in the Network 23 building are Commodore 128s if that's of any consolation.